



**Testimony of Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski, President
Connecticut Counseling Association**

**S.B.1 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN’S MENTAL HEALTH
HB5322 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A HUMAN SERVICES
PERMIT AND A REQUIREMENT THAT SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS CONDUCT HOME
VISITS DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR.**

Education Committee Hearing, March 21, 2022

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty and esteemed members of the Education Committee, my name is Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor and President of the Connecticut Counseling Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony and raise our concerns with both SB1- An Act Concerning Children’s Mental Health and HB5322- An Act Concerning the Creation of a Human Services Permit and a Requirement that School Social Workers Conduct Home Visits During the School Year. **We support the goals of SB1 but would urge you to add “school counselors” to Section 1, 2 and 20 of the bill. We also strongly oppose HB5322 creating a human services permit and the same provision that is in Section 3 of SB1.**

The Connecticut Counseling Association is the only professional organization that represents the approximately 3300 Professional Counselors, 600 Professional Counselor Associates, and counseling graduate students here in Connecticut and is a branch of the American Counseling Association.

The Connecticut Counseling Association supports the overall goals of SB1 but would urge the Committee to add school counselors to Sections 1 and 2 of the bill and particularly the grant program. School Counselors are critical part of the student support services available to students. They follow the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework (CCSCF), created to ensure ALL students have access to a high quality and effective school counseling program. School counselors, in accordance with the requirements set forth by the Department of Education are required to have a master’s degree, graduate credits in counseling and special education, a professional educator certificate, practicum and internship experiences in school counseling.

We also strongly oppose HB5322, which seems to also be included in Section 3 of SB1. The bill would establish a human services permit but it is unclear what the permit will allow the person to do. This seems to run counter to the current mental health clinician licensure process

requiring certain educational, clinical and internship experiences. While we appreciate the need for greater mental health support, we would urge the committee to focus instead on hiring trained professional counselors and other professions. Too often we have seen that school counselors and other school supports are the first cuts when schools need to save money.

Our other concern is that this proposal would give districts a cheaper and less experienced alternative to those trained. When ARPA dollars run out, will districts commit to school counselors, school social workers and school psychologists remaining funded or will they look for a cheaper but non-experienced or appropriately trained permitte. We understand this would be temporary but do not feel this is the answer.

Instead, commit to professional counselors and our peer mental health clinicians. Open funding opportunities for these people with this background to be trained as professional counselors or another profession. Encourage and incentivize training and join the counselor licensure compact to allow out of state providers the ability to practice in the state. These are all better solutions.

We appreciate your consideration of our testimony and urge the committee to include school counselors as part of SB1 and not move forward with the human services permit. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Counseling Association and all professional counselors in our state.

Respectfully,

Dr. Sarah Evans Zalewski

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